

# How Cancer Affects Your Oral Health



Cancer isn't just a challenge for the body; it can also impact your oral health. This flyer breaks down the ways cancer treatments can affect your mouth and provides practical tips to keep your smile healthy during your journey.

## What are the side effects of chemotherapy on my teeth and mouth?

When you're facing cancer, the treatments like chemotherapy and radiation can cause some oral health challenges. Common dental issues include:

- **Dry mouth:** Chemotherapy reduces the amount of saliva in your mouth.
- **Sores:** You may also develop sores on or under your tongue, on your gums, and on the soft lining of your mouth.
- **Sense of taste:** Your taste buds might also change, meaning they won't recognize certain flavors the way they did prior to chemo.

Taking care of your oral health during these treatments is important.

## What can I do to keep my mouth healthy?

- **Be sure your dentist knows you have cancer.** Remember to see your dentist two weeks before you start treatment for a full exam.
- Once you start treatment, **check the inside of your mouth carefully every day** for sores, bleeding or other problems.
- **Use a soft toothbrush** to be gentle on your mouth. If brushing causes you pain, try softening the bristles for a minute in warm water before brushing.
- **Choose a mouthwash without alcohol** to avoid extra dryness and rinse your mouth often with a mixture of baking soda, salt and warm water.

## What foods should I eat to avoid hurting my teeth and gums?

Your mouth may be extra sensitive during your treatments, but eating healthy is critical when you have cancer. Good options are mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, cooked cereals (oatmeal) and yogurt. Chew slowly and take small bites. Swallow your food with a little liquid if it helps.

Avoid crunchy or spicy foods, like chips and salsa, or anything high in sugar, like candy or juice. Don't use toothpicks, because you're at higher risk of infection if you scrape or cut your gums or cheeks. Be sure to avoid tobacco and alcohol.



*NOTE: This is for informational purposes only. If you have any concerns or questions, please reach out to your medical provider.*

TotalHealth wellness program provides increased dental benefits for members with qualifying health conditions (including cancer). To learn more please visit [deltadentalwa.com/totalhealth](https://deltadentalwa.com/totalhealth)

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